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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0121  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1542  
RUEHC/USAID WASHDC  
RUEHPH/CDC CDC ATLANTA GA  
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SUBJECT: FLOODING HITS INDIA'S EAST AND NORTHEAST HARD

REF: KOLKATA 201

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Heavy rains since July 25 have flooded large areas in Assam, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. Almost all the districts of Assam are flooded, killing 16 people and affecting 1.1 million people. Water levels in rivers across Assam have receded over the past 48 hours. Assam's Relief Commissioner says that conditions are improving and the state has not asked for GOI assistance. In Bihar, however, the situation has deteriorated. Rivers are flowing above the danger mark and 24 people have died so far. The Bihar government has sought help from humanitarian agencies and both the Indian Army and civil society organizations are helping to provide relief and rescue operations. END SUMMARY.

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Assam  
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¶2. (U) Flood waters have inundated large stretches of land in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Mizoram - states in India's Northeast region. Assam is the worst affected state, with 24 out of a total 27 administrative districts flooded by water from the Brahmaputra and other rivers. Dibrugarh (in Upper Assam), Dhemaji and Lakhimpur are three districts that have been particularly affected. While the official death toll is 16, other local contacts told Post that about 25 people have died.

¶3. (U) According to assessments made by the Assam government and civil society groups, nearly 4,500 hectares of land have been inundated and 26,000 hectares of crop fields affected. Drinking water sources have been partially affected in most areas as well. People who were stranded have been placed into one of 275 relief camps that have been set up. The Assam government is providing food supplies to the camps. Gaps remain, however, in the supply of potable water and there are reported problems with sanitation, provision of adequate cover and shelter, and storage. Contacts have reported incidents of diarrhea and enteric diseases in the camps but these are isolated incidents and not at "outbreak" levels. Since a large number crops and cattle have been destroyed by the flooding, resuscitating livelihoods will be a problem down the road.

¶4. (U) The state government has asked UNICEF for mosquito nets, oral rehydration solutions and water purifying tablets. The

Inter Agency Group consisting of Catholic Relief Services, Action Aid, Oxfam, CASA, and UNICEF, along with their local partners, have deployed their resources to complement the Assam government's relief and rescue operations. NGO contacts told post that getting relief to the people was a bigger problem than supplies. Washed out roads, bridges and inundated railway tracks are seriously impeding movement of relief material.

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Bihar  
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¶15. (U) Although the rains have stopped in Bihar, water traveling from upper riparian areas of Nepal has inundated 14 districts (out of 38), killing 24 persons so far. According to officials in Bihar's Disaster Management Control Room, 3,152 villages have been effectively "marooned." About 550,000 hectares of land is submerged and 6.9 million people affected by the flooding. The state political leadership has appealed to all agencies for humanitarian assistance. Bihar's Flood Control Room personnel told Post there is an acute shortage of polythene sheets. The Control Room sought Catholic Relief Service's contact information from Post which we provided.

¶16. (U) Amid the rescue efforts, Bihar politicians have entered the fray with accusations and counter-accusations. After surveying Bihar's flood affected areas from his helicopter, Indian Railway Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav criticized Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for traveling to Mauritius on a business trip during the current crisis. There were local media reports about relief being distributed according to each flood victim's political affiliation as well.

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Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura  
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¶17. (U) Flood waters have inundated a few districts in Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. In Arunachal Pradesh - located north of Assam - the hardest-hit districts are Lohit, West and East Siang, Upper Subansiri and Upper Siang. All the rivers flowing through these districts - Siang, Sibho Korong, Lohit, Nao Dehing and Kamlang -- are flowing above the danger level as of August ¶1. In Tripura, the overflowing Gomti river submerged parts of South and West districts. About 4,300 families were affected and a few houses damaged.

¶18. (U) COMMENT: Every year, the monsoon rains in the upper reaches of the Himalayas flow down the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna river basin --- flooding large tracts in Assam, Bihar, Bangladesh and other states in East and Northeast India. This results in loss of life, property and livelihoods for people living in these areas. The lack of good infrastructure such as roads and railways hampers relief and rescue work. While the causes and impact of the annual flooding are generally well understood, implementing preventative measures and coping mechanisms would require the involvement of at least five countries to find a regional approach to the problem. As long as such an initiative is not in place, local mitigation efforts will continue to be inadequate and temporary.

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